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Interview with Zoltan Rieder

Transcript

Mr. Rieder: Do you want me to talk or do you want to ask questions? What do you want me to talk about? I'm very pleased to have a chance to talk about this because most people are talking about the horrors, and I think more to talk on the *chassudim* (kindnesses from Hashem), that Hashem was helping. Many people ask where was Hashem (G-d) when all this happened? He was there. Yes. And I have seen miracles – that might sound strange but during the time I was there, I was seeing miracles. And to be honest, at the moment I didn't realize. It was only years later, looking back, I said that was a miracle.

The Belzer Rebbe said that every Jew that survived is a miracle. I have a friend who was working in a coal mine at the end of the war, when the Germans were moving the Jews away so that they wouldn't be liberated. He was walking three days in the snow barefoot. They had wooden shoes but they stuck to the snow so they couldn't walk, so it was three days, day and night walking. So it was a miracle. He himself said that he can't believe that he survived.

For example, one comes to my mind. Many people died from diarrhea, and my brothers – I have two brothers, they were with me in Auschwitz – my brother's wife is a Jewish doctor. He is a rabbi and his wife is a doctor. My brother knew there was medication and went to the Jewish doctor from Holland and asked why were they not giving out the medication, they were letting people die. And the doctor said that the Germans weren't interested in healing, they were only killing, murdering. So my brother asked the doctor to write down on a piece of paper the name of the medication and my brother asked a soldier, one of the guards who spoke Hungarian, to please order it and give the boxes to the doctor. So in this way, he saved a lot of lives. This by itself, that a soldier, a German, was willing to buy this medicine for Jews, that is the first miracle. Now the medication, it costs money, they didn't see money for a long time since being in the camp. And they needed it. So what did Hashem do? He arranged that the workers got cigarettes. The Germans gave my brothers and me a premium of cigarettes, and this we were able to give to the soldiers instead of money. This was the only time that they gave us these cigarettes – never before, and never after. To be able to pay for medicine instead of money.

Me: When you were growing up, were you religious?

Mr. Rieder: Yes. I was attending yeshiva until the deportation. Three in particular were the Gelanta, Szerdahely, Opayi. The Opayi was a small village, the floor was dirt. The rabbi was very famous and very sharp. He didn't sleep in bed except on Friday nights. He was awake practically all night. The Germans kept stopping the yeshivas, which is why I had to go to multiple. There were many. Szerdahely – the rabbi learned with me in private in the mornings. At Opayi the rabbi learned with me in the evenings. We learned Talmud, and *Yorah Deah*. I would say there's a problem here, there's a question,

and without me even saying what the question was, he already would answer it. He ate in the Beis haMidrash. He never prepared what he was going to say. We used to say, “say a midrash” and whatever was mentioned, he was so sharp, he would speak on that topic.

Mr. Rieder: Another thing is it's a known fact that Hashem creates help before it's needed. So as a child, I always had an inclination for electricity. So when we got to Auschwitz, and we heard what happens in the crematoriums – people had been there for years and knew what was going on and said there were chimneys. When we said that we hoped we could go home, the kapos told us “this is the way home,” and pointed to the chimneys. I thought, Hashem will help me survive. He won't let me go to the chimney, to the silo. So my brother was running around and he found out that they need technical workers. In this way, we would survive. They would take us out of Auschwitz to work. He decided that we should volunteer as tradesmen. My brothers volunteered as carpenters, and I volunteered as an electrician. There was some chance of being a carpenter but I didn't have any feeling for carpenters, or carpenter work and I remember seeing the big axe and I couldn't lift it, but electrician – I liked it. And also, being an electrician, I thought it was more likely for us to stay together, because it was unlikely they would need three carpenters, but whatever they were building I thought if they need carpenters, they might need an electrician. So we agreed, this way we could be out from Auschwitz in a couple of days. And we went to a new camp, just in preparation. The barracks were made only from cardboard.

My brother went to the officer he thought was the *lagerfuhrer* and offered to clean his barrack or do whatever he needed. And the German officer – the *lagerfuhrer*, the leader of the men who volunteered – asked him to work for him, to clean out his barrack, and whatever was in it. And it was said that he needs two people, and he brought my other brother. In this way, my brothers helped a lot of people.

Number one, the food that was left, every drop that was left by the German soldiers, was not allowed to mix with the camp, with the barracks with the other Jews, to help some lives, but my brothers did it. One day the *lagerfuhrer* found out that they were taking the food to the Jews, and he was very angry. He considered himself all high up and the Jews were at a very low level, how could we take his food for these swine, these pigs? So my brother said there was more than enough food for you. With this food, the Jews would be able to work harder for you (the Germans) so it would benefit him as well. Then he said I'm going to shoot you! My brother said “Here I am, shoot me. But I'm going to give the food to the people.” I said, “you are going to shoot me too.” And my other brother said him too.

My father was also sent to the crematorium. The man who was working in the crematorium, putting the cadavers into the oven, recognized my father. That is how we know the *yartzeit*. The man working in the crematorium went and found my sister. He told my sister that her father was there.

We had arrived to the camp in the boxcars. We got there on a Friday night, and they kept

us in the cars until Shabbos around noontime. Then they opened the doors and said you have to come to the office to get identification cards, leave your baggage in the cars and you'll pick it up later. This was a lie. We had to leave our baggage. Then they took everyone on the cars and they made us go in the showers. Then they took the sick. When we came off the train to the building there was Dr. Mengele. You might have heard the name. He was there. And he saw which people were too young or too old or too sick, and he sent them to the crematorium. He sent my father to the crematorium that day. Dr. Mengele was pointing that young, old, couldn't work, or sick, would be sent to the crematorium.

About a week after *Pesach* (Passover), the police came to every Jewish house to pick up every Jew, and put them on the trains. The police took all the Jews from their homes and gathered them in the shul courtyard. From there they were taken to the ghetto, and from there, to Auschwitz. When we were taken to the shul courtyard, there came an order from Budapest government that my father was exempt from the roll and could go home, because he had medals from the First World War. What happened that time was my father was very giving, and very diligent, always learning. He always kept a *sefer* in his pocket, so he never told us this, but a bunch of us found out that there was a time that in the First World War, Germany was fighting Hungary. My father spoke very good German. The Germans were surrounding the Hungarian army. My father played a trick and told the Germans that Hungarians were surrounding the Germans, and if they gave up, he promised them special treatment. He helped the Hungarians win that war. As a result, he was exempt from the Jewish law and need not be deported. And the police gave the order that my father and my family could go home. We were exempt from the Jewish roll.

But my father said in Yiddish, I'm a Jew like the other Jews, and I want to be together with the Jews. What happened? Two days before this, a famous *rebbe* in our town, his daughter-in-law gave birth to a boy two or three days earlier, so he said if we are going home then the mother and baby should come home with us. In order to get this week at home, and the young lady with her baby with us, her father-in-law, the rabbi, was taken to the ghetto, and he was able to arrange for the *mohel* to come to our house and we were able to do the *bris milah* (circumcision). So we stayed in the house for two weeks and then we were also taken to the ghetto, and then we were all taken to Auschwitz, in a boxcar.

I spent four days in Auschwitz before being taken out to the labor camp, where I spent a year. In Auschwitz they took everything except your shoes. They only gave us pajamas, no underwear or anything, and a "keppel" they gave us a yarmulke. And this was Shabbos when we arrived. Sunday morning, we wanted to *daven*, but we had no *tefillin*. My brother wanted to find the *tefillin*. So then later he comes back happily and says that he found a man who we can buy *tefillin* and a *siddur*. But how can we buy it when we don't have anything? So my brother said, "Let's take the bread that they gave us and give it to me for the *tefillin*." So this is how we got a pair of *tefillin*. And the *siddur*, a small *siddur*. One of the Jews, a kapo, was in charge of the Jewish barracks. He had been for years earlier. Most of the kapos were Jews from Poland. He was the one who sold us the *siddur*.

My brother found out that they were looking for technical tradesmen, four days later we were taken out from Auschwitz to the new camp. That is why we never got tattooed with the number. We just got the number on a string. And it was five digits. In the new camp there were only about 500 people, and there was only one pair of *tefillin* in the whole camp. So my brother let everyone know where the *tefillin* is. And so every time, when people wanted to take the *tefillin* to say the *shema*.

There were two young boys who were in this camp. And one day there came an officer from the Central and he saw the two boys and he told the *lagerfuhrer* that they were too young to work. They should be sent back to Auschwitz. But my brother begged the *lagerfuhrer*, please don't send them back. He said, "I'm not going to stick your neck out for two boys." My brother said, "you don't have to. I promise no one will ever see the children." And the children, they were already in their teens, and they put them in the kitchen to peel the potatoes. And they never left the barracks or the kitchen. And that was really something, and after Hashem liberated all the camps and my brother sent these boys to yeshiva in Manchester England - I'll show you a picture they sent me. They boys are in the middle. They send me a picture each year. This is a group picture in the *shul* in Manchester. And here are the two boys.

This photo is in Manchester in the 40s in a yeshiva, and it's right after the liberation.

Now they live in Williamsburg, they are married with children and grandchildren. They are now very religious, *Hassidish* boys. After the liberation, their father survived also. A month later, the point is that their father was sent to Siberia. The Hungarian army, their government, didn't trust Jews to be soldiers, but they didn't want to let them go either.

So they were put to work. The men were sent to Siberia, and their father was also sent to Siberia and one of my brothers was also sent. *Baruch Hashem* (bless G-d) they both survived to get back. And their father, there was a book *Churban Europe* (the destruction of Europe), he wrote a good thanking to my brothers for saving his sons. And one of the boys told me he's carrying my brother's picture with him all the time.

Mr. Rieder: in Keresztur, in Hungary there was a very famous rabbi, the Bodrogkereszturi Rabbi. We used to go on his yartzeit to Keresztur.

I met two people who said that in the first world war, they didn't want to go into the war, so they stayed with him. They were hiding there in his house. I knew one man, named Mittleman, who said he was born by the rebbe's house. I asked him how he came to be born there. He said that his mother was pregnant and came to visit his husband who was hiding in the rebbe's house and while she was there, she had her baby.

In 1944, a Jewish boy was learning in yeshiva and wanted go to home before Passover. Thirty years earlier, the grandfather of that boy was staying with the Rebbe. The rebbe told the boy's grandfather that there would be very bad times for the Jews, unlike any before. And the rebbe knew he wouldn't be around then but that the grandfather would

be. He told him that if the grandson of the man would go to the rebbe's kever, he would help him. The man advised this boy to go to the kever of this rebbe, and he did, and then he wanted to go home to his parents. But a German soldier saw him from a distance and shot him.

One the way back to his family, there was a big bridge across a river and it was guarded by German soldiers so the boy avoided the bridge and crossed a field near the river. The boy was on the open field and the German soldier saw in the binoculars that it was a Jewish boy and shot him. The boy fell down, and then a farmer passed by and put the boy on his wagon, covered him with hay, and took him to a hospital in a nearby town, and he survived. He lives now in Canada. All thanks to the Bodrogkereszturi Rebbe.

My mother was very close with the rebbe's wife, the rebbetzin. They sat near each other in synagogue. The rebbetzin promised my mother that they would be neighbors in Gan Eden (paradise) also. My mother was pregnant with me, she saw the Rebbe in her dream, who told her that she would have a boy and that he should be called after the Rebbe. So my name is after the Rebbe. His name was Rebbe Yeshaye of Keresztur. My name is also Yeshaye.

My family followed the Komarno Rebbe. He spoke openly, we called it *ruach hakodesh*. He knew exactly what was happening all over the world. My father was a student of the Chasam Sofer's grandson, from the *shevet* (tribe) of Sofer. He was a great scholar before the Second War. Very diligent. My father never wasted any time... He was very concerned even that the children would waste time, do anything other than learning. My father had a lumberyard in our town, a small town, making construction lumber. He also had an industrial lumberyard in the other town. So every morning he went to *shul*, and when he came back from *shul* he had breakfast and took the train to the other town and then he went to the rabbi to learn until he came to the train to come back. He was very kind to everybody and never refused any request, whenever anybody asked him to lend them money, or to co-sign a bank note even when my father knew that he would have to pay it. Many times he wrote down in his calendar when the bank note was due because he had to pay it, as a co-signer. I remember when I was a young boy, one morning he came back from *shul*, and he told my mother that he had heard that in a neighboring town, was a family – Friedman – who couldn't pay their mortgage with the bank and the bank wanted to repossess their house. So my mother said to my father I feel sorry for the family. If they have no money to pay the mortgage, how are they going to pay their rent? And that's one problem. In addition, they said, the house was next to the *shul*, the synagogue. And there's a window to the courtyard of the *shul*. Who knows who is going to buy the house from the bank? It could be a *rasha*, or a non-Jew or anti-Semite, so it's not good. My father said, let's buy the house, and let them people keep living in the house. So my mother went to the auction with the bank and told the man, Mr. Friedman, you can continue to live in the house with your family as you did until the deportation. My father said, "I don't want to be anybody's boss." He didn't want to charge money. If there's any way we can repair the house, let me know. And that whole family were all taken to Auschwitz. I never mention names, but I think that it's already so many years and none of them from that family came back, and I was talking to someone here in *shul*

and I mentioned it, someone just mentioned the name. He said he was from that town. He knew the family and was related. So this is the kind of person my father was.

My sister also told me a number of times about a business in the neighboring town to Keresztur in Hungary, and my family used to walk home. It wasn't too far to be walking. But my father didn't want to waste the time by walking so he used to put his hand on his daughter, my sister's shoulder, and in the other hand he had the *sefer*, and he didn't look where he was walking, and just looked in the *sefer*. I mentioned it to my brother and he said he used to do this with him also.

One of my brothers, as I mentioned was sent to Siberia, and the other did business, delivering lumber and textiles in Budapest. The Hungarian government owned the wooden slats under the railroad tracks and this is what my father sold to the government. My brother once went to Budapest to get the money. My father begged him not to go because the German soldiers were already in Budapest. My brother said if we don't go now, we won't get it. But he was arrested while he was there at the railroad station, so he was not in Auschwitz. So these two brothers were not in Auschwitz. My mother and two daughters who were single, they were with my mother. They worked very hard to produce, so that the Germans would see that my mother was producing so that was alright. And my sister used black shoe paste in my mother's hair so that she would look younger and she also survived and returned. My sister lives now in Boro Park as well. My mother survived too.

After my mother returned home, none of the girls had their parents, so my mother took the girls to our house and took care of them all there. One family with three or four sisters insisted that they wanted to stay in their parents' house. It was smart, in this way they wanted keep the house because the parents of the others who didn't come back, other people occupied the houses, and it was lost.

My mother said that the girls were welcome in my house but if you want to stay in your parents' house, do whatever you like. So they stayed there, and one of the girls got engaged, a number of weeks or months later, so my mother asked her, "My daughter, when are you going to make the wedding?" So the girl said, "You're like a mother to us, so I'll tell you truth, we don't have the money to make a wedding." My mother said, "That's the only problem? Don't worry about it. You go discuss with the *chasson* (groom) what day you want to make the wedding and I'll take you to Budapest and buy with you what you need. You're like my own daughter. I'll make the wedding. Just discuss with your *chasson* which day you want." They got married and the children and grandchildren are still living.

After liberation, my brother bought back the Bodrogkereszturi rebbe's house, which had been occupied by gentiles. He bought the house, renovated it, fixed it up. And now every year on the *yartzeit*, hundreds of people go there to eat there, pray there, and learn there. Nobody lives there – they pay a gentile man who lives across the street to take care of the house, but to pay the taxes, electric bills, and do repairs. My brother died

about 6 years ago. His wife still goes there each year and pays the man, and takes care of the house.

Also I remember when I was a young boy in our town there was a young girl, a child.

She was sick. The doctor pronounced her dead. They put her body on the floor and put a *yartzeit* candle out for her and my mother brought her back. I don't know, but she might still be alive. A number of years ago when I was at my mother's *yartzeit*, she was in *Har Menuchos* (a cemetery) in Jerusalem. My mother bought her plot there herself and paid for it. She bought the place by herself through my cousin who had been working in the Israeli government. And this is very rare, when my mother got married, she saw herself on the day with the *kvir*, at the burial. After someone dies, there is white linen that they wear and she sewed it for herself, called *Tachrichin*, meaning that even when she got married, a young woman, she was preparing the white linen clothing for burial. When we were at Auschwitz, that got lost like everything else. So when she returned from Auschwitz, she sewed new ones, in Hungary. When she came to the United States, she bought linen and a needle and thread, and the one that she sewed in Hungary, she put it in a box and wrote on it that it should be given to a poor woman. And it sat in the closet for years, I assume that's what it is. I never opened it. But when my mother died, I took it to an organization that should give it to a poor woman. And the little girl who she saved her life, I saw her when I was going to my mother's *yartzeit*. At that time she was already an old lady. I took the bus in central Tel Aviv and she recognized me. Her granddaughter was getting married, and she recognized me and said her granddaughter was getting married and wanted me to come to the wedding the next night. I said I would like very much to go but I already had a reservation to come back.

A similar story was with a boy. A young boy died, and my mother brought him back.

Me: How did she bring him back?

Mr. Rieder: There were two things. The main thing is personality. She knew how to do it. There was a prayer. She knew the song and the prayers to do to bring him back. She knew people very well. So much so that when she got married, she came to live in the town and there was a famous rabbi in our town. The rabbi's wife, the *rebbetzin*, sat next to her in the *beis midrash*. And one day the *rebbetzin* told her that I promise you will be *zocheh* to be in *Gan Eden*. (This means you will merit to see the Garden of Eden). You can see that if the *rebbetzin* herself says that they would be neighbors in *Gan Eden*, she was special. Usually if there is a wedding with the grandchildren from this Rebbe, if I can, I go for the *chuppah*. I don't stay for the dinner, but why do I go? Because it's known that the *neshomas* come from *Gan Eden* for the wedding because Hashem brings them in to see the happiness of their children and grandchildren. So if there is a wedding of the descendents of this rebbe, if I can, I go the *chuppah*.

A number of years ago there was a wedding in Williamsburg of the granddaughter of the rebbe, and I went to the *chuppah*. Afterwards, I went up to her to say *mazal tov* to the granddaughter of this rebbe. She said that two or three weeks before the wedding she saw my mother in her dreams, and my mother asked her to call us on the telephone and

tell us that we should go to the wedding because my mother wanted to see us. So even though we knew that only the rabbi's descendents were getting together, she was there.

Also this same rebbetzin told me a number of years ago when I was in Israel, that she was with a group elderly people who went down in Israel to Tiberias and one evening she saw my mother in her dream there. They were very close. My mother said, "Malka, you are here and you're not going to come to visit me?" My mother was already in *Haar Menuchos* and Malka said I don't know where you are! So my mother told her where the *kever* (grave) is, she knew everything exactly. So in the morning the *rebbetzin* got up, she told her husband she was going to Yerushalayim. He said no, but she said, no I am going! She said she didn't have to look for the place, she went straight to the *kever*.

In the beginning of our time at the labor camp, in those days, we were working in the railroad station. They put material on the regular trains with wider tracks and then it was sent down the tracks to the railroad station and from there it went on narrower tracks. We had to carry over from the wide track boxcars to the narrow ones. In the beginning I was carrying cement which was 50 kg or 100 pounds. Then *Baruch Hashem* they started building an office building for the work organization and I was there working as an electrician, I just started. The building also from the railroad station to the forest needed electric. So we had to put up the poles and the lines. There was a German engineer who was the leader. So initially we had him. I was carrying the electric poles and when he saw me, I was skinny and taller than today, he said that I should lower myself and I shouldn't carry too much. He was a nice one. I was putting up the lines, and was always watching what he was doing. I thought I knew already what he was doing so I told him that he didn't have to stay here, he could take it easy, and go away when you want, and I can see that we'll go on. He said, "are you crazy?" but I knew what I was doing. I said you won't lose anything. Go away for an hour or two and come back and see if you are satisfied, and if so you can go away again. You don't lose anything. It took time but eventually he let me do it. So I was running the show. No one was chasing me saying, hoopla hoopla hoopla (which is what the German engineer used to tell us in order to make work farther). I gave the report every night – we worked from 6 am to 6 pm – and each night after we were done working, I gave the report. I was in charge of maintenance though, so I was on call. If anything went wrong, I had to fix it.

I used to give the report what work we did each day but I told them since I don't have paper or a pencil, I will dictate it to you. So I dictated to him and he wrote it down. So then he got tired and said forget it, so I didn't have to give any report, and no one was chasing us.

I used two men to dig a hole to put in an electric pole so they could take turns and rest. We were building the office for the organization. As we passed by them, the officer from the work organization knocked on the window and said I should go into the office. The officer said "Don't you see, it's sabotage. The men are standing and not working." Hashem reminded me of our time in Egypt when *Moshe Rabbeinu* told Pharaoh in Egypt, that even slaves can't work seven days and need a day of rest. After having a day of rest,

they can work better. Pharoah agreed and gave them one day off, and *Moshe* chose this day to be Shabbat. I said this to the officer and it worked. I told him, look what hard task they're doing. This way they're resting a few minutes so that they can keep working. That's why there are two men using picks to knock the stones, one resting for a few minutes so that they don't get tired. It was a miracle that I remembered to quote *Moshe* and it worked.

When the German engineer was running the work, he installed the electricity in the building, so he measured wires, number of sockets, bulbs. I told the *lagerführer* that the fuse would burn out and a new one needed to be ordered but I didn't know when we would get it. I offered to personally pick it up and the officer agreed. I said I was Rieder from the "Shatterwork" camp and I need the fuse. The man called his boss and the boss said he should give me whatever I ask for. I got a truckload of material- electric bulbs, switches, porcelain globes. Now I needed a place to keep the material. There was an empty room in the office building and I kept the materials there, so people could come there to warm up and rest. I gave these materials to the other workers. The Germans in charge of the working groups couldn't get bulbs, or switches, or whatever wasn't available in stores, and I gave it to them. They sometimes offered cigarettes or bread but I didn't take anything. This way I covered myself. One day I was particularly pleased, because one man who I had given bulbs to was whipping a Jew. When I walked by, he threw down the stick and stopped – I was happy that because of me, one less man got beaten.

I wanted to give a present to the *lagerführer* and the kitchen chef. I asked permission from the owner of the machine shop. I designed a reading lamp that mounted on the wall, which I gave to the German kitchen chef that was in charge of the kitchen. I also made a reading lamp that I gave to the *lagerführer*.

The first *lagerführer* was a terrible guy – he was happy to see Jewish blood. The reason why I mention this is because there was a small miracle. When he was transferred to another camp, he wanted to take my brother with him. I heard when he said to my brother that he wanted to take him because I was on the roof installing an antennae. I went to the new *lagerführer*, who happened to be a very nice person. He went to the railroad station and brought back my brother. The old *lagerfuhrer* wanted to keep him, but the new *lagerführer* said he was now in charge and responsible for the people, and brought my brother back.

One night in December, there was a terrible storm. The *lagerführer* told my brother he wanted to talk outside in the dark. The *lagerfuhrer* shook hands with my brother and me and the *lagerführer* promised to protect us from the Germans if we promised to help him after the war. The *lagerfuhrer* wanted my brother to wrap up civil clothes for him and leave it by the railroad station. Before liberation, the *lagerfuhrer* was transferred to another camp. He came back to see me. At this point the Allied forces were getting closer, and the Germans were moving the Jews further away. In this case, the Russians were close and they took us to a more central location, and my brothers were sent to another place. This was called the death march. This *lagerfuhrer* was so nice, he came to see me and told me that my brothers were alive and were probably liberated by now.

So when Hashem liberated me, I recalled that my brother had taken the package of civil clothes for the *lagerfuhrer* to a house and I thought he might be there. I went there and it was a bar. I asked the woman there, and told him my name "Rieder from shatterwork" and told him that if she saw him, I would be back at that time. The next day I went back and he was waiting for me. He had two beers, one for himself and one waiting for me. I thought he would want a letter, a statement, that said he was nice to us, but he didn't ask for it. He was really very nice.

One time when my brother went to buy beer and other things for the soldiers, he noticed a man from our town. This man was hardly alive. Because he was so weak, my brother begged the *lagerfuhrer* to let him work and help him recuperate. He agreed; they arranged that he would be in charge of the warm water in the kitchen. The man was at the camp day and night. He recovered, and was eventually liberated, and put in charge of a kosher kitchen. After the liberation, the Klossenburger Rebbe, made a kosher kitchen where there had been a camp before. He put this man in charge. This rebbe really saved a lot of yiddishkeit. He sent the boys to one end of the camp and the girls to the other end. He was watching over everything.

I had the key to the building with the transformer. One day the German engineer asked for the key. I gave him the key and forgot that I gave him the key. I asked the engineer to turn off the power so that I could fix the cable. It was 220 volts, so if the electricity wasn't needed in that area, I asked him to turn off the electricity so it was safer. I didn't know, but he turned the electricity back on, but luckily I saw that the lights were on and I realized the electricity was back on. I was working and later I noticed that the lights were on, and remembered that I gave him the key. So I couldn't move. I waited until I saw a Jew on the ground and asked him to do me a favor and ask the engineer to turn the power back off. Maybe that isn't a big miracle, but it saved my life.

There was a big storm late at night. The storm tore the cables going from one pole to the other. We had been working day and night. The whole area was surrounded by soldiers, but I was always coming and going because I was doing the maintenance. I was told to fix the cables. I was thinking what to do. Water is a very good conductor and it was pouring. It was impossible to fix it and survive. On the other hand, they would shoot me if I didn't fix it. I didn't know what to do, because either way was dangerous. Hashem reminded me of a story. There is a story that once, King David didn't know what to do. In the siddur it doesn't explain what the problem was, but I saw in a *sefer* when I was a child what the problem was. King David had a vision and didn't know if it was a prophecy or not. If it's a prophecy and he doesn't say it, he will be killed. If it's not a prophecy and he says it, he will be killed by the Jewish court, the *beis din*, for being a false prophet. He decided that he wouldn't say it, because if he doesn't say it, it's a punishment only from God. On the other hand, if he said it and it wasn't true, the *beis din* would kill him for sure, because they have no mercy. If I didn't fix the fuse, the Germans would kill me for sure. So if I went to fix the fuse, Hashem would have mercy on me that the German soldiers did not. I fixed it and survived. I hit my head on the wire, and the whole time there were sparks flying, but I survived. The miracle was that Hashem reminded me of the story. So I remembered that story and I used it to survive.

Usually people talk about the horrors, but I am more interested to think and talk about the miracles. Many people wondered where Hashem was when all this happened. He was everywhere.

The son of the king was misbehaving, so the father sent him away to a dangerous place as a punishment. But the father is still a father, so the king went to this place. The son didn't know the father was there, but when there was a real emergency, the father, the king, saved his son's life. This is the same with Hashem. Of course millions of people died, but it is written in the books that those people that were murdered reached a very high level- *Gan Eden* (the Garden of Eden). It's a special place for them. If a man lives religiously a thousand years, he could not reach the level that the people that were murdered reached. My father was put through the crematorium, along with many other people, but we did not lose them. They are still helpful to us.

When we came to the US, it was difficult to get a visa. My sister could not get one and lived in Bolivia. There was a revolution and fighting in the street. One bullet entered the house and my sister got scared and laid down on the floor with her children. She fell asleep and saw our father in her dream. Our father said "Don't worry my daughter, nothing will happen to you."

I have a cousin whose brother didn't want to go to the army, and the police went to his father's house and asked where he was. The father didn't tell him where he was and was killed.

This cousin, my father's sister's daughter was forced into labor in Siberia with her daughter. She got herself Gentile papers, so they would go to a Gentile family for a while, get thrown out, and go somewhere else. One evening, they didn't have anywhere to go and it was a very cold winter night. She didn't know what to do- she was walking in a tunnel and she was very tired. She sat down on the ground and fell asleep. She saw her father, who was murdered because her brother didn't go into the army. The police went to her house and the father said he didn't know where the son was- he was beaten and transported to the camp. The father said "Don't worry my daughter. Don't give up. Pick yourself up. Walk out from the tunnel. When you go out from the tunnel, you will see a light in two houses. Don't go to the first house. Go to the second house- they will let you in and you can stay there until the end of the war. Your husband will come back safely. However, you have to promise that after the end of the war, you will start a kosher kitchen." That's what happened- the husband came back and they started a kosher kitchen.

Hashem mentions to remember the covenant. Hashem says that he will remember his covenant with Yaakov, with Yitzhak, and that he will remember his covenant with Avraham. Why doesn't Hashem mention remembering Yitzhak specifically? Rashi asks this. The answer is that Hashem said is that the ash from Yitzhak is on the alter in front of his eyes. If you see something, you don't have to remember because it's already visible. But what does it mean, "the ash"? In the sacrifice of Isaac, he was ready to be slaughtered by Abraham. Even though Hashem told Abraham not to do it, the fact that

Isaac was ready to be slaughtered, Hashem considered it as if he had done it and been burned. If you want to do a mitzvah, and you are able, Hashem considers that it has been done. If someone wants to commit a sin and doesn't do it, Hashem does not punish you. So the people who survived are not at the same level as those that were slaughtered, but they are at a high level. I honestly thank Hashem that I was there. The murdered aren't here anymore, but they are more than here. Similarly people who survived the Holocaust, it is as if they were killed, and they are not on the same level but also on a very high level with Hashem. The very fact that they were in that danger gives them the high level spiritually.

There is a story among Jews. The former Satmar rebbe was in Israel for years. When he wanted to leave, his followers asked him who is going to give them advice, say a prayer for them, or help them, when he was in the US. He said to them, if they're in shul and they see a man putting on *tefillin* and they see the numbers on his arm, they should ask him for a blessing. The survivors are on a very high level.

I went to school at Yeshiva University. I got scholarships all the way through, I never paid for anything. I got my Bachelor's, Master's in math and physics, and PhD at YU in physics – statistical mechanics. My thesis advisor, Dr. Lebowitz, was a specialist in this field, statistical mechanics, and travelled the world talking about it. My project was sponsored by the Air Force Office of Scientific Research.

I worked on various projects, I private companies. I also worked in metallurgy. There were no materials that would withstand the heat of space travel, and we were working at a metallurgical company to come up with new materials. Some of the projects were secret, with secret clearance. So much so that I couldn't take my notes home to my apartment.

If I knew something, I said it. If I didn't, I didn't say anything. Later I realized to not be embarrassed and to just say the truth. Always be with the truth. If something isn't as it should be, admit it. One day someone asked a question and I wanted to say I didn't know. Hashem reminded me of something I had heard and with this I answered the question.

I told the other boys at the Yeshiva to tell me if I did anything wrong, and that I would thank them for it. Even if it's right and I could do better, they should tell me. I was there to learn.

Hashem feels with the Jewish people, and if they are hurt, it hurts him. Since he is feeling with us, we can be sure that we'll never disappear. Even in the hard times, during the Holocaust, Hashem was there, and helping. He performed miracles and saved people, even then.

Biography

Rabbi Zoltan Rieder was born in 1925 in Bodrogkeresztur, Hungary, and went to yeshiva and lived there until the deportation. After surviving the Holocaust, he studied physics

and statistical mechanics at Yeshiva University and now lives in Boro Park, Brooklyn.